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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 6 October 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

GENERAL DISCUSSION ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (agenda item 6) (continued)

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited the participants to resume their discussion of sub-theme II on self-representation and full participation. Any comments on issues raised at the preceding meeting in connection with sub-theme I on the right to life, survival and development would be welcome, since the two sub-themes were closely related.

2. Mrs. KARP pointed out that the right to life, survival and development, as embodied in article 6 of the Convention, included the concept of social development. Referring to the statement by the World Bank representative at the preceding meeting on the cost-effectiveness of the inclusion of disabled children in society, she said she had been struck in particular by the comment that economists were not accustomed to thinking in terms of rights. She therefore suggested that, in accordance with article 45 (c) of the Convention, the Committee might recommend that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to undertake studies on the cost-effectiveness of the inclusion of disabled people, which might encourage society at large and individual Governments to favour such an approach in future.

3. Ms. SALEH (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), referring to information provided by Inclusion International and the Commission on Human Rights and to her own practical experience, drew attention to the fact that national legislation often discriminated against disabled children and prevented their entry into a country, even as tourists.

4. Ms. POULTON (Christian Children's Fund) said that the Christian Children's Fund was active in the newly independent States and other countries in Eastern Europe, where its activities focused on the problem of social isolation in the home and institutions. It also encouraged parental involvement, capacity-building, resource mobilization and public education advocacy.

5. Ms. MIRONOVA (Christian Children's Fund), providing information on the situation in Belarus, said that her organization had launched its activities in 1993 with a major project funded by the United States and aimed at children from Chernobyl and ensuring capacity-building for national non-governmental organizations. Two large-scale programmes funded by UNICEF were now under way: one provided training and the opportunity for exchanges of information for social workers, teachers and students; the other dealt with the social and psychological problems of Chernobyl victims.

6. One of the Fund's main areas of activity in Belarus was work with disabled children. It was helping to ensure their integration into society through, inter alia, the establishment of rehabilitation centres and the creation of a network for specialists working with disabled children and their parents. The Fund also supported creative initiatives for disabled children, such as the opening of an art studio for deaf children and theatre workshops organized with the assistance of volunteers from the cultural and academic

fields. Young volunteers played a significant role in different projects under way throughout the country and organized excursions and cultural activities for disabled children and their families. In 1997, it was hoped that a training programme could be launched for volunteers to work specifically with the disabled.

7. In November 1993, Belarus had been the first of the former Soviet Republics to adopt children's rights legislation based on the Convention. In 1995, a number of Belarusian NGOs had set up a committee to monitor the implementation of that legislation and follow up alleged violations of the rights it was designed to protect. The Committee was drawing up plans for the establishment of a national committee on children's rights and had proposed amendments to the new legislation. It had established a good dialogue with the Government and could influence decision-making at different levels.

8. Ms. MOURAVIEFF-APOSTOL (International Federation of Social Workers) said that her organization attached great importance to the idea of society for all. While democracy had made great strides, economic development was curtailing the effects of that progress. Society now faced a paradoxical situation in which the privileges of democracy were increasingly restricted to certain groups only, with discrimination on the grounds of age, nationality and disability. People must consider carefully what kind of world they wanted to live in and appropriate policies should be formulated for that purpose. Economic achievement was only one aspect. Society must cater for the needs of all - old and young, able and disabled alike. There would never be an ideal society, since human nature was an important component; the question was one of striking a balance and working with human nature in order to bring out the best in it. Cost-effectiveness was one argument for the inclusion of the disabled, but it should not be made the main reason for living together.

9. Ms. KIELLAND (World Bank) said she was not sure what the economic evaluation of rights was. She associated rights with human values. The World Bank did conduct economic evaluations of integration and deinstitutionalization, but such projects were regarded in terms of investments, not in terms of rights. She endorsed the previous speaker's comments: human values went far beyond economic evaluation and it seemed highly inappropriate to apply World Bank criteria to such issues.

10. Mrs. KARP said that, according to the Convention, rights should be seen not in abstract terms as a moral obligation, but, rather, in practical terms as an entitlement to certain services and facilities in everyday life. It was high time that economists should expand their research on the evaluation and comparisons of different types of economic systems, including one which favoured a policy of inclusion, and developed suitable economic indicators for that purpose. Even the World Bank ought to reconsider its approach and begin to realize that rights were tools for everyday life and not merely the stuff of court cases.

11. Mr. FOX (American Bar Association) said that a solution to such problems might be found if the World Bank were allowed to become a party to the Convention. Like other international organizations, it had the capacity to enter into treaty relations. The problem was that the Convention was open to

states only, but that obstacle could be overcome by drafting a protocol or an amendment to the Convention allowing international organizations to become parties to it.

12. The CHAIRPERSON said that, since its establishment, the Committee had been discussing the problem of how best to involve international organizations in its work. In that connection, she referred to article 45 of the Convention, which provided for the participation of United Nations organs within the scope of their respective mandates.

13. Ms. HURST (Disabled People's International), referring to comments on how to cost human rights and the cost-effectiveness of inclusion as opposed to exclusion, said that the best approach was to evaluate the costs of exclusion. When people referred to the expense of disability, they meant that the exclusion of disabled people from mainstream society was very expensive. The costs of building special institutions and organizing special transport for the disabled were extremely high. It was far more cost-effective to provide public facilities with physical access for the disabled, since it was likely that other sectors of society, such as the elderly and mothers with children, would benefit too. The costs of exclusion as opposed to the cost-effectiveness of inclusion frightened the developing world and were used as a argument for continuing to exclude the disabled from society. It was worthwhile noting that a number of interesting studies showing the cost-effectiveness of the inclusion approach had been undertaken in connection with the World Summit for Social Development.

14. With regard to self-representation, she stressed the need to look into ways of ensuring that the views of disabled children were heard in future. Disabled adults should not speak on their behalf.

15. Ms. BLOM (Swedish Organization of Handicapped-International Aid Foundation) said that it was very important to encourage disabled people to speak for themselves and provide them with the necessary support to do so. The rights dealt with in articles 12 and 13 of the Convention applied to all children, including the disabled. Sweden had taken an important step towards self-representation by providing personal assistants for all disabled children, thereby allowing them greater freedom of expression and action. Enough had been said about disabled children; it was time to talk to them and to heed their views. She was not of the opinion that disabled children had special needs; their needs were the same as those of other children, and they merely fulfilled them in different ways.

16. Ms. SUTTON (International Save the Children Alliance) said that the Convention and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities placed great emphasis on the participation of children and the disabled in decision-making and recognized the exclusion they felt when adults and non-disabled people took decisions for them on matters that affected them. However, as borne out by information contained in the booklet entitled "Children's Statements", based on interviews with children involved in various Save the Children projects throughout the world, the sense of exclusion experienced by disabled children was far greater. Since the predominant image of disabled children was one of helplessness, they were even less likely to be consulted on decisions affecting their welfare. Policy

makers and financial backers often saw the usefulness of consulting children and the disabled only after they had provided services and facilities which were not suited to their needs and which then required costly adaptations.

17. Steps must be taken to ensure that the participation and consultation of children was really useful and not merely tokenistic. The results of research carried out by Save the Children on child participation in decision-making showed that barriers to self-expression had to be broken down, for instance, by providing sign language interpreters, material in Braille and information that was easily understood and in a format readily accessible to children and the disabled. Peer advocacy was also useful and the training of professionals to listen properly to children's views was essential.

18. The CHAIRPERSON said that children's participation was an entirely new idea which would have to be championed by the Committee if it were to gain universal acceptance.

19. Mr. BASURTO (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that, although a pragmatic approach was needed to children's problems, an important point was being missed in the general human rights debate: the substantive provisions of the Convention made no reference to the emotion of love. He quoted a UNICEF digest on children and violence, which showed that the vast majority of young victims of homicide had been killed by their parents. Infanticide was even defined as a lesser crime than murder in many legal systems. Some thought had to be given to the contradictions of a world where competitiveness was glorified, despite all the talk of solidarity. Disabled children needed love more than anything else, yet the Convention dealt only with rights and was addressed to Governments. It was hard to ensure respect for rights which were apparently of little benefit to society and public awareness and recognition of those rights had therefore to be heightened. Voluntary organizations could play a very useful role and had to be included in efforts to that end.

20. Cost-effectiveness was relevant only in the context of preventable disabilities, which accounted for a mere 30 per cent of the total, whereas the entire disabled population deserved compassion. The needs of disabled persons could not be formulated solely in terms of rights. The only emotion which could really produce a change in perception and in disabled persons' lives was love.

21. Mr. MUNTARBHORN (Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, and Asianet) said that the countries which spent the least on the disabled spent the most on arms purchases. The ratification of the Convention by Governments was not enough; its provisions had to be morally accepted by everyone. Non-governmental actors were increasingly required to abide by the Convention. Some NGOs had declared their support for the Convention, although they could not sign it. Why could not international organizations do the same thing? They should include children's rights in their work, especially when they evaluated the impact of their programmes on children. He wished to see stronger support for families and carers and was in favour of deinstitutionalization. Disabled children above the minimum age of employment needed more job opportunities. Religious leaders could also play a key role in influencing the values and attitudes of communities towards disability,

which should not be regarded as a curse. Programmes which could be easily adapted to children with a wide variety of disabilities would improve the response to those children's different needs. Discriminatory laws should be reformed. The disabled, including children, should be offered more opportunities for participation, as youth volunteers, for example, because, unless their voices were heard, the goal of the fuller realization of their rights would not be achieved.

22. Mr. WAHLSTROM (Inclusion International) asked whether the Convention was available in an easily understandable form.

23. The CHAIRPERSON said that it was, since many countries had issued simplified versions and translations in minority languages.

24. Mr. WAHLSTROM (Inclusion International) welcomed the information provided by the Chairperson because accessibility was crucial and other countries might be encouraged to follow such good examples.

25. The CHAIRPERSON said that the importance of the accessibility and comprehensibility of the Convention had been drawn to the attention of State parties from the outset.

26. Mr. ROMAZZOTTI (ATD Quart Monde) stressed the importance of promoting the participation of disabled children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, since social and medical services were often oblivious to their needs. Violence and infanticide were not synonymous with a lack of love. For some families in developing countries, allowing a disabled child to die was the only way to ensure the survival of his siblings. It was the people who allowed such an intolerable situation to exist who should be anathematized, not the parents. The same held good for women who had decided to have an abortion because the foetus was malformed and they had neither the financial resources nor the physical strength to cope with a disabled child at home.

27. Mrs. KARP said that evaluating cost-effectiveness and sharing love with disabled children were not mutually exclusive. Love was synonymous with all that was implied by human dignity, a core concept of the Convention. The Convention required Governments to help parents and the general public understand the meaning of that concept. The idea of inclusion was an inherent part of teaching children about the value of being different and about understanding others. She disagreed that the cost of prevention was the only item which could be evaluated. Resources could be saved by assessing the value for money of services and the cost-effectiveness of benefits and allowances.

28. Disabled children faced additional obstacles to participation and the exercise of their rights because they were more dependent. Many lived in institutions which did not set great store by empowerment. A mechanism therefore had to be set up to enable such children to lodge complaints and ensure that their difficulties were taken into account in general policy. The legal profession should play a more active role in helping children exercise their rights and express their views. Empowering parents was also an inseparable part of children's participation in society.

29. Mr. CASSIRER (Handicap Collectif) said that disabled children were future disabled adults. Their education therefore had to focus on teaching them to manage by themselves and to make their own decisions. They had to learn gradually how to cope physically with challenges. Teaching them to be independent was the key to educating them properly.

30. The CHAIRPERSON invited Ms. Saleh (UNESCO) to introduce sub-theme III on the right to inclusive education.

31. Ms. SALEH (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), noting that the instruction of disabled children and young people had been part of the educational sector for almost 40 years, said that two of the major landmarks in the last two decades had been the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 and the World Conference on Special Needs in Education: Access and Quality, held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. The former had brought a breakthrough in respect of participation and empowerment, while the latter had highlighted the importance of early childhood care and the adoption by Governments of a policy of offering inclusive education in ordinary schools.

32. There had to be a holistic approach to the Convention, all articles of which were relevant to disabled children. Many of the principles it embodied were also contained in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education and reflected in the concept of early childhood education. In her opinion, the linkage between education and the issue of rights had been a major achievement. The rights of the disabled had been acknowledged and provided for in a number of international instruments and were being increasingly reflected in national legislation. Education for the disabled had at first lagged behind medical and social progress in that people had still been placed in institutions where they had received special education that left much to be desired. The quantum leap had come with the recognition of the potential and capacity of all children to develop, provided that they had a more responsive environment. Schooling was increasingly being extended to many groups that had previously been excluded.

33. It should be recognized that inclusion was a right, not a privilege. The concept of inclusive education was now gaining ground and beginning to replace the concept of integration, a change which reflected a change in attitudes towards the disabled that took account of social and political factors. The issue should not be seen in terms of disabled children whose disabilities needed to be remedied, but rather in terms of how schools could better respond to a diversity of learning needs. The fundamental principle of inclusion was that all children should be entitled to learn together in ordinary schools, but that principle could be put into practice only by a reform of the education system as a whole. More flexibility would have to be introduced into the curriculum and teacher-training courses would have to be modified. In that connection, she pointed out that UNESCO had been involved for the past eight years in a teacher-training project designed to help schools meet the needs of all children. The mobilization of support, the proper allocation of available resources and parent and community participation were also crucial.

34. Inclusion presented a major challenge to educators because it called for a rethinking of accepted values and beliefs, but she believed that more information-sharing, especially the sharing of information on good practice, would enable that challenge to be met. The issue of inclusion raised serious questions about what kind of society should be the goal and what the role of schooling within that society should be. UNESCO, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission had carried out a joint study of education for the disabled with a view to developing a special instrument for collecting data which would help define indicators. Tests in the field had already been carried out and the results of those tests would be reviewed shortly. Once the instrument had been finalized and had become part of UNESCO's existing system of data collection on education generally, the information obtained could be fed into the Committee's ongoing exercise of reporting on the implementation of the Convention.

35. There had also been attempts in several countries, including Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, to develop indicators on inclusive schooling by asking individual schools what policy they followed in that regard. As early as 1988, UNESCO had prepared a document to assist Governments in reviewing education for children and young people with disabilities by identifying the areas in which they had made progress and the areas in which they had lagged behind.

36. In conclusion, she stressed that UNESCO's mandate covered all children, including children with disabilities. Just as the needs of girls and women were seen as an issue which crossed inter-organizational boundaries, so the needs of the disabled - the world's second largest population group after women - should also be regarded as an issue of universal concern.

37. Ms. HABIBI (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that more emphasis should be placed on the need for changes in attitude, not only among decision-makers, but also in society generally. Family support was crucial, too, not only for disabled children, but also for disabled parents. Studies in Cambodia, for instance, had shown that many children were unable to attend school because they had to care for their parents. Why was it that rehabilitation at the community level was still reaching only 5 per cent of the population, although it had been accepted in principle for the past 20 years? Why was it that fewer than 1 per cent of children with disabilities had access to schools? Those were the questions on which United Nations agencies, NGOs, civil society and, most important, Governments needed to focus attention.

38. Ms. STUBBS (International Save the Children Alliance) noted that the provisions relating to the disabled child in article 23 of the Convention were open to misinterpretation, particularly the term "special care" in paragraph 2 and the term "special needs" in paragraph 3. In fact, the disabled children's needs, food, shelter, love, protection and education, were not special, but the same as those of other children. Similarly, the expression "subject to available resources" in paragraph 2 might tend to reinforce exclusion rather than to promote inclusion. Another problem her organization had encountered was that the needs of disabled children were not currently a fashionable development issue. Children as a whole tended to be marginalized within the

development process, but disabled children tended to be even more marginalized. At different times, certain groups of children were seen as more appealing than others, for different political reasons. At present, child labour, the sexual exploitation of children and street children were the topics that attracted major inputs into conferences and major funding proposals. There was thus a need for all concerned to examine their attitudes and motivation in relation to their support for human rights campaigns and to see whether their priorities reflected objective reality or mere personal bias.

39. Another problem was the range of misunderstandings, myths and fears surrounding disability. Most people grew up in a segregated society, which knew little about disabled people and regarded them as different and exceptional, thus perpetuating exclusion. A distinction also had to be made between impairment and disability. Impairment was a normal part of human life and could be either visible or hidden: the extent to which impaired children were also disabled often depended on the attitude of parents, teachers and neigbours towards them, on how far their basic needs were met and on how far they had access to appropriate basic support. The impact of disability on families should also be taken into account. It was estimated that, if 4 per cent of the inhabitants of a developing country with an average family size of six members had a moderate or severe disability, 25 per cent of the population as a whole would be directly affected. The main reason why disabled children were excluded was not the lack of resources or of special provisions, but ignorance and prejudice. Gender bias also played a role. Female children with impairments were much more likely not to survive and there was a much higher ratio of disabled female children in institutions, as well as a lower ratio of female disabled children in schools.

40. Her organization's experience showed that inclusive education could not take place in isolation, but should form part of an overall strategy for inclusive development, capable of building a school system responding to the real diversity of children. That system had already been shown to result in reduced drop-out and repeater rates, thus creating improved access and improved quality of education for all children. Experience in developing countries had shown that inclusive education meant more than inclusive schooling, in that, once established, it would extend to the family and community and continue throughout life.

41. It was often assumed that inclusion could not apply to the most severely disabled children. However, if enough was done to raise awareness in the community, such children did not have to be isolated and could be helped to learn at home without having to be placed in a special institution. It was important to promote inclusion from early childhood. In China, where in the past disabled children had been excluded from kindergartens, a pilot programme designed to raise awareness among teachers, parents and administrators had been launched, under which children with mental disabilities had been integrated into all classes in schools. That had resulted in a complete transformation of the school system, whereby child-focused teaching as opposed to teacher-focused teaching had become the norm, although class sizes remained huge and resources scarce. That pilot programme had now been extended to cover an entire province of 56 million people.

42. In short, inclusive education was not an expensive luxury for the few, but led to improved standards for all. With basic educational opportunity, the disabled could learn not only to benefit themselves, but also to become productive members of their communities, thus reducing poverty. It was development fashion and personal bias which influenced debate on the rights of disabled children and there were many excuses for procrastination and lack of action. The key to success lay not in more research, more data collecting or more resources, but in more practical action.

43. Ms. MBOI said that she supported that view. She pointed out that the discussion had already lasted for seven hours and many interesting ideas had been put forward, but there was now a need to agree on policies and strategies that Governments would actually be able to put into effect. Ninety per cent of disabled children were to be found in developing countries, most of which were not even able to provide basic services for their population as a whole. There was already broad awareness of the merits of inclusive education, but in practice most developing countries were obliged to focus on priorities.

44. She therefore suggested that a small working group should be set up to formulate specific proposals for action by Governments and to define concrete examples of good practice within the family and the community.

45. Mr. EIGNER (Inclusion International) commended UNESCO for what had been a very positive contribution to inclusive education. A small understaffed and under-resourced department had managed to produce durable strategies and practical policies of use to both developed and developing countries. Inclusive education was the most important aspect of inclusion efforts because, in the long term, it would solve the other problems faced by the disabled. Inclusive education was a logical outcome of articles 28 and 29 of the Convention. In addition, it was essential to emphasize the benefits that inclusive education could bring to all students, whether disabled or not; the inclusive classroom, as the representative of UNESCO had said, was also the best classroom for the highly gifted student - an argument that should be used to counter the re-emerging tendency in some industrialized countries to consider reintroducing special classes or schools for the highly gifted.

46. Inclusive education was a human rights and social justice issue that was of concern not merely to school authorities, but also to society as a whole. It had to begin by being the subject of political decision-making. It was the right of every disabled child not to be excluded or segregated. Since most of the opposition to changing the educational system came from teachers, who were sceptical of the value of inclusion, one major challenge was to reshape those attitudes.

47. Ms. FRAPPOLA (Inter-American Children's Institute), referring to conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the Institute had been working on the subject in 36 countries over the past three years, said that the aim was to make schooling as inclusive as possible. However, in view of the current crisis in general education, the priority goals were to provide access to education for all children, including disabled children, and to ensure that no child, whether disabled or not, was forced to drop out of school.

48. However, it was also important to maintain a choice for both family and child between different ways of including the child in the education system. Inclusive education should not mean dismantling the system of special education, which should continue to be a back-up to the ordinary school system.

49. Values in the education system were also important, as other speakers had said. Many educational systems were assessed in terms of academic success. That should, however, not be the only criterion. It was also important to assess the impact the educational system made on the child's own well-being and happiness and the contribution it made to the child's sense of identity and belonging. Values were important not only for teaching staff; they also had to be inculcated in children themselves, to counter the tendency of adolescents to form exclusive groups, and throughout society as a whole.

50. Mr. CASSIRER (Handicap Collectif) said that inclusive education made a positive contribution to society in that it encouraged tailoring teaching to the individual, the key to better education as a whole. Disabled people should not be regarded as a burden, but as making a vital contribution to variety in society and to social dynamics in a way that the monotony of uniformity could not.

51. Mr. LINDQVIST (United Nations Special Rapporteur of the Commission for Social Development on Disability), endorsing the proposal that a working group should be established, said that there were three aspects to consider in looking at any joint strategy. The first was to review whatever recent information on the treatment of the disabled child was provided in the reports of States parties to the Committee in order to add it to that available to UNICEF and UNESCO. Secondly, an organizational solution should be found for establishing and circulating a code of good practice. Thirdly, the issue of inclusion and the needs of disabled children should be brought forcefully to the attention of all parties concerned, whether Governments in the industrialized world providing support in the form of technical development, major financial institutions throughout the world supporting technical cooperation or Governments in the developing countries.

52. Mr. WAHLSTROM (Inclusion International) said that he endorsed Ms. Mboi's proposal for the establishment of a working group.

The meeting was suspended at 5.15 p.m. and resumed at 5.35 p.m.

53. Ms. LANSDOWN (Children's Rights Office - United Kingdom), summing up the discussion, said that 10 key issues had been identified as matters of serious concern. Attention should be drawn to the need to combat abuse, oppression, discrimination and non-inclusion as violations of fundamental human rights, to which disabled children were entitled in exactly the same way as other children. The magnitude of the problem had to be recognized. Much of the disability among children had been the result of conditions adults had created; adults thus had a responsibility to tackle the physical, social and economic factors involved. Account also had to be taken of the humanity behind the statistics and efforts made to remedy the social isolation and the denial of opportunities for participation and love that were a violation of children's rights. There was a need to combat the attitudes that led to the

lives of disabled children being considered of less worth than other lives. That required political action at the highest level, legal reform, practical programmes at the community level, commitment to inclusion and deinstitutionalization and the engagement of community and religious leaders as advocates for that process of change.

54. All children everywhere had the right to life. Failure to take all active measures to promote the survival and development of disabled children on an equal basis with other children was a very serious violation of the Convention. Discriminatory laws should be abolished. There was an unspoken assumption in much medical and scientific research that perfection should be the goal, but, although it was right to seek to minimize impairment and harm to children, denial of life itself as a strategy for the prevention of impairment should not be countenanced.

55. Strategies had to be developed to address the rights of all children, disabled or not, and to ensure equal access to schooling, medical care and treatment and practical support. However, the rights of disabled children would be tackled only when the need to change the physical environment - access to transport, buildings, etc. - to allow all to participate fully in society had been recognized.

56. The approach to disability should be holistic. That had to be the message to States parties in implementing the Convention and to non-governmental bodies and others assisting in that task. The Convention should be used as a starting framework of principles backed up by the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities as a source of detailed guidance for action. Action had to be taken at the international, regional, governmental, local, community and family levels in order to implement change throughout society. The need for participation by disabled children had to be recognized. Unless the knowledge, experience and wishes of disabled children were taken into account, poor decisions would continue to be made on their behalf. Participation in decisions was a crucial part of the personal development of all children, including the disabled, and helped them to grow up to be active participants in democratic societies. Without the right to be heard, children would continue to be vulnerable to violation of their rights. In addition, parents were the key to their children's empowerment and needed practical encouragement and support in that effort.

57. The denial of the rights of disabled children on the grounds of cost must continue to be challenged. The right question to ask was whether society could afford the cost of exclusion, which meant the loss of everything that disabled children could offer it. Much of the failure to promote inclusion lay in the lack of political will rather than in the lack of resources. Inclusion was a fundamental right, not a privilege. It was about changing the school to fit the child, not the other way round. It was about making disabled children productive members of their families and their communities. Ultimately, unless attitudes were changed, the circle of discrimination, exclusion and exploitation could not be broken. The general feeling of the debate had been that the time for talking had come to an end and the time for action had arrived.

58. The CHAIRPERSON said that 14 recommendations had been made for future action by the Committee. They were that it should: promote the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities as providing relevant standards for the implantation of the Convention and work with the Special Rapporteur and the Panel of Experts; commit itself to providing an early General Comment on disabled children; commit itself, during its consideration of the reports of States parties, to highlighting the situation of disabled children and the need for concrete measures to ensure recognition of their rights, including, in particular, the right to life and maximum survival and development and the right to social inclusion and participation, emphasizing that the monitoring of the situation of disabled children in all States must be undertaken to promote the collection of statistics and other information to allow constructive comparisons between regions and States; underline the need for States actively to challenge attitudes and practices, including infanticide, traditional practices prejudicial to health and development, superstition and the perception of disability as tragedy, which discriminated against disabled children and denied them equal opportunities to rights guaranteed by the Convention; in view of the appalling impact of armed conflict in causing disability of hundreds of thousand of children, encourage the ratification of the Ottawa Convention as a matter of urgency; underline that persisting laws in many countries affecting disabled children were not compatible with the principles and provisions of the Convention, such as legislation which denied disabled children an equal right to life, survival and development, including, in those States which allowed abortion, discriminatory laws on abortion affecting disabled children and discriminatory access to health services, legislation which denied disabled children the right to education and legislation which compulsorily segregated disabled children in separate institutions for care, treatment or education; work in cooperation with UNESCO, UNICEF and other relevant agencies to ensure that inclusive education was included in the agendas of meetings, conferences and seminars as an integral part of the debate on education; encourage the development of emancipation research with disabled children on methods of undertaking consultation, involving them in decision-making and giving them greater control over their lives; promote the dissemination of a system of good practice, backed up by the preparation of training material, such action potentially being undertaken by one of the aid agencies, such as the Swedish Organization of Handicapped - International Aid Foundation or Save the Children in collaboration with some disabled persons' organizations; encourage Governments to make such training materials available at the community level in appropriate forms for children and disabled people; work towards the inclusion of the rights and interests of disabled children in the agendas of multilateral and bilateral agencies, development agencies, donor agencies, funding organizations, such as the World Bank and regional banks, and technical cooperation agencies; encourage research into the provision of statistics and empirical evidence to: (a) promote awareness of the extent to which the right to life of disabled children was denied; (b) challenge the widespread existence of superstition, prejudice, social stigma and denial of access to education in relation to disabled children; and (c) encourage the prominence of the issue in the production and discussion of bio-ethical conventions; encourage relevant agencies to develop programmes which promoted alternatives to institutionalization and formulate and promote strategies for deinstitutionalizing children; encourage all bodies providing

information to the Committee during the consideration of the reports of States parties to ensure that their submissions included the perspective of disabled children; and consider what mechanism to introduce as part of the way forward, such as establishment of a working group to prepare a plan of action.

59. Mrs. KARP thanked all participants for their contribution to the discussion. It was important that it had been permeated not only by intellectual insight, but also by emotional insight and understanding. The aim of inclusion was to create a better society by enabling it to accommodate a wide spectrum of individual ability, bearing in mind that enhancing the human dignity of children with disabilities also enhanced the human dignity of all children and adults alike.

60. The CHAIRPERSON concluded the discussion by reading out a short story which had been written by a seven-year-old and was a graphic illustration of the plight of a disabled child.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.